Italy combined, but the population of the whole Northwest Region is only about thirty-five million.

Northwest China is an area of 1,232,159 square miles, one third the size of all China, with a population only 5.8 percent of the nation's total. It represents, however, a great complexity both geographically, culturally, and ethnically.

The region is characterized, even more than the nation as a whole, as a unity with diversity. Its entity is partially cultural with a predominant religion of Islam and a common historical as well as political background. While climatic conditions are relatively uniform, ranging from semi-arid to arid of the extreme temperate continental type, its physiographic features very considerably. In addition to the thickly peopled humid and mild Han-chung Basin in Southern Shensi, there are large low-lying rich fertile riverine plains along the Wei-ho, Huang-shui, and some parts of the main Yellow River, as around Lanchou of Kansu and near Yin-chuan (Ninghsia) plus the Ili valley of Sinkiang and numerous small oases scattered along the foot of the snow-capped high mountain ranges of Nan-shan or Chi-lien, Kunlun, and Tien-shan. They are thickly populated areas either in large stretches or isolated pockets. Next come the vast plateaus and deserts of Alashan, Khara Gobi, Takla Makan, and Northeastern Dzungaria forming an extension of the Great Gobi of the Mongolian plateau. Each of them is enormous, e.g., Takla Makan desert occupies half of the Tarim Basin (910,000 square kilimeters). They are practically uninhabited except for a few small oases scattered here and there. Next are the arid and semi-arid upland basins of Tsaidam and Koko Nor in the province of Chinghai and Southern Dzungaria of northern Sinkiang. The semi-arid steppes are occupied by pastoral nomads, while the ared portion is either inhospitable or very thinly populated. Last come the lofty mountains. Some of them are snow-capped with alpine pastures and forests like Tien-shan, Nan-shan and the Altai mountains. Some of them are barren and rugged like the Kunlun, Bayan Khara, and Altyn-tagh. The former provide natural bases for the development of transhumance and lumbering, while the latter precludes any permanent human settlement, except for a few high mountain passes which are occasionally traversed by traders and travelers, such as across the mountains of Kunlun, Bayan Khara and the Pamir.

As to historical and political relations with China, there are two distinct parts. Shensi and Kansu (excluding Ninghsia) are the sites of ancient Chinese culture - the archaeological finds of the "Oracle Bones" of the Shang Dynasty and the Yang-sha pottery in Shensi and Kansu date back at least to one to two millennia B.C. The Wei-ho valley plain is the cradle of Chinese civilization.

/Chinese, Chinese Moslems and Sedentary Tibetans/

181 use it. In this little backwater town large business deals were
436 effected, but each roll of dollars received for payment was opened, the contents carefully examined, and the individual coins valued a little higher or a little lower according to the Tunhwang standard." (pp. 69-70).

423 The landowners in the Tunhwang district are mainly Chinese
181 whose ancestors were established here very long ago. The Chi-
369 nese farmers are more conservative than the town folks. The rural
241 rural pattern here is different from that of other parts of the North-
36 west. Here the farmsteads are dotted over the area, each stands in the center of its own land and each at a considerable distance
(351) from the other. The larger farms are surrounded by a high wall
(342) which is a small fortification, and inside the wall is a substantial
(62) house made of sun-dried bricks and excellent timber. Most of
(614) the farmsteads are spacious and built to accommodate large numbers of people, for it is customary that all the members of a clan live together in their generations.

631 The author of The Gobi Desert recorded another interesting feature of the Tunhwang oasis. The record says that Tunhwang is divided into as many sections as there are prefectures in the whole of the province of Kansu. Its colonization brought men from all areas, who were anxious to honor the cities which they represented, by erecting temple buildings. The result is that the traveller wanders through the oasis as through a replica of the whole province of Kansu, stepping from the section called after the town of Chingchow to that called Liangchow, from Kaotai to Pingfan, or from Pingliang to Titao, in the course of an afternoon
(532) stroll. Near one of these temples was a very old carved stone
(102) figure of a man, which was not an idol but was said to represent a historic personage.

157 Of the Chinese people of the wayside in the Gobi Desert
485 Miss Cable writes: "The intense isolation of the inhabitant of a
(511) small oasis, and the extraordinarily low standard of life imposed upon him, produce a strange mentality. His normal condition is torpor. He sits or lies on his mud bed and thinks of nothing. Only when a traveler arrives does he experience the discomfort of rousing himself, but then though it may be cold or windy, he must leave the pleasant stuffiness of his bed-living-room, throw off the greasy coverlet which he has drawn over his crossed legs, come into the open and give the service, which is demanded of him as innkeeper. The life of the innkeeper's wife is more bare and poor. Clothing, which has some place in the thought of nearly every woman, is, to her, absolutely nothing but a protection from cold and a covering for her nakedness. The other incidents of her life are concerned with food and the birth of her children. She knows that her husband has some money, but she has never thought of money as a means of securing comforts

2: Teichman G-5 (1919) 1921 AF13 Northwest China AF13

and importance, political, commercial, and military, it entirely overshadows all the other towns in Shensi and Kansu, and is altogether the metropolis of the great agricultural North West, the land of loess and wheat.

Hsian is a backward place as regards the improvements of modern civilization, no macadamized roads, no electric light, no foreign carriages. Amongst other conveniences waterworks are required, as the water from most of the wells in the city is very brackish; good water could easily be brought from one of the many clear streams which emerge from the Ch'inling Shan a few miles to the south. There should be a boom in big contracts in Hsian when the railway gets there, or before.

We were too busy during our short stay to do much sight-seeing, but felt constrained to visit the Pei Lin ("forest of stone tablets") where the Nestorian Tablet now is. A large rubbing industry has sprung up (or perhaps it has existed for centuries or thousands of years) and almost every other stone has its attendant Chinese busy taking an impression. One would imagine that the more important inscriptions would get seriously damaged by this incessant rubbing, and indeed such appears to be the case. Outside is a shop where these myriad rubbings are busily sold, and their export from Shensi is quite a trade. The Chinese are, of course, great amateurs of ancient curios, inscriptions, and other historical records, and Hsian and Central Shensi is for them a happy hunting ground in this respect. It seems curious that this region has not received more attention from European scholars interested in these matters, since it contains the beginnings of everything as far as Chinese history is concerned, and the latter is hard to beat for an early start; sand-buried cities in the heart of the deserts of Central Asia are ransacked at great difficulty and expense by scholars of various nations, but it does not appear that much if any excavating has been done on the Hsian plain, which contained the capital of ancient dynasties which flourished three to four thousand years ago. The Nestorian Tablet, which dates back eleven to twelve hundred years, records the propagation of Christianity in China by Nestorian missionaries from Western Asia in those days. It is curious that this faith should have so completely disappeared, while Maho-

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

first time, foreign onions, which were large and of a very good quality. Homespun cotton materials were also to be bought, as this district,[1] unlike many others, produces a very fair cotton crop, which the men spin, and weave by hand on primitive looms. Kaotai also supplies a very superior kind of anthracite, which when burnt in a brazier is practically smokeless, giving off intense heat for hours; its fumes, however, are unpleasant to those unaccustomed to them.

From Kaotai there are two roads to Suchow, used alternately according to the season of the year; we took on this occasion the upper one following the foot of the Richthofen Range, where, between the oases, tracts of coarse gritty sand are found overlaid with small black pebbles, which presented an excellent and firm surface for our carts.

The first stage in this direction brought us to the ruined city of Camel-Town, an ancient settlement, dating from the time when North-West Kansu was under the sway of great Mongolian chiefs. Tradition has it that this was the centre from which King To-lo, probably a ruler during the time of the Mongol supremacy which terminated about the middle of the fourteenth century, controlled his tribe.

This was the first of the large buried cities we had yet seen, and interested us greatly. The massive clay walls of the enclosure still stood, showing the extended area once inhabited, but now the only building not completely ruined was a temple, with a lean-to of one room, in which lived an old man and his wife. It was an isolated spot, bearing a bad name for brigandage, and no carter spends the night there willingly. We had arrived late in the afternoon, having started early in the morning, so we had declared our fixed determination to get a night's rest here at any price. While

[1] [Kaotai -- Analyst]

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

172 wandering through the deserted temple-courts, where huge, grotesque, clay-images of gods loomed, we perceived, in the corner of a small shrine, two men fast asleep, with their heads pillowed on their bulging cash-bags. A few moments later, we saw these same individuals quietly remove the stones barricading a side door, through which they then slipped and vanished. The action seemed suspicious, for the honest traveller in China is always ready to exchange road-information with other passers-by. We therefore asked the old woman who they might be, but for answer she drew one of us by the sleeve into the recesses of her hovel, and then whispered: 'Nobody knows, and we dare not question them, but they have been hiding here for two days.'

233 Having explored the shadow-filled temple, we proceeded to visit the lonely guardians of a camel encampment, whose tents were pitched about a quarter of a mile distant, where the animals fed on the prickly herbage abundant in the neighbourhood. Seeing us coming, the drover called in his fierce dogs, who at a word slunk behind the tents. Round these the camel packs were symmetrically stacked in a semicircle, while the browsing camels themselves were to be seen outlined against the horizon.

000 The head-man now came forward, and to our surprise we found ourselves confronted by a Lanchow College graduate, the son of just such a wealthy house as that we had lately visited at Fuyi; and presently, over a cup of tea, a delightful hour followed of unconventional, human intercourse, not only with this intelligent, well-educated man, but also with the drovers, for China is a land where a real, though unconscious, democracy exists. When we rose to leave, our host gave the signal for rounding-up, and all the savage dogs then rushed

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China A

bid her farewell, before she would permit the s
words to pass her lips she washed her face and co
her thin hair, feeling it to be disrespectful to th
True God to address Him unprepared. Such a s
this, met with on the road of life, one can never f
She was ripe for the Call; and she heard it, an
glad.

The next city is Ansi, which also bids fair t
appear under the encroaching sands, as these
already drifted round it as high as the top of th
It is a cold, storm-swept place, exposed on ever
and with neither coal nor wood obtainable. The
is said to blow every day in the year, but in the
it is so fiercely terrible that all shops are close
everything is at a standstill. Every household
lives, eats, and sleeps on its dung-warmed *kang*, n
surprising that so many while away the weary
with the fumes of the opium-pipe. Ansi lies
cross-roads, where the great track from Suchow
off towards Hami and Eastern Turkestan, meeti
the main road to the Oasis of Tunhwang, four
to the south-west. The fame of Tunhwang had a
reached us. We had entertained at Suchow a p
American archaeologists from Harvard Univ
who had recently been there for the purpose of
its art treasures. Not being able, however, t
their purpose, they were returning to Peking, c
away a rather unfortunate impression of the Tur
population, and they warned us that we should fin
turbulent and somewhat rough-spoken. This d
alarm us, however, as our search was for trea
a different kind, which called for excavation of a
and less obvious nature.

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

484 you.' We had not gone very far when a mounted soldier galloped alongside. 'Ask him his honourable name,' said the senior member of the party from the recesses of the cart, 'and how many children he has.' This led on at once to a friendly conversation, and soon we were supplying the soldier with pears, and a share in the lunch we were carrying, while in return he gave us an immense amount of information, more or less reliable, about the whole district. The road proved indeed 491 difficult to find, and as, from the moment of leaving the 133 fertile land surrounding the city, until we reached Chienfutung, we did not meet a single human being, 172 we should have inevitably wasted much valuable time had we been unescorted. For some time we ploughed our way heavily through the loose sand, to emerge finally on a gravel *glacis* of uncompromising sterility. Eastward stretched a range of sandy foothills, whose outlines were always changing under the bidding of the winds, but which, tradition affirms, hide beneath them the ruins of a very early civilisation, while ancient records speak of at least two towns, at one time ruled by Mongol princes, no traces of which can now be found. The whole impression given, is that of a thickly-inhabited district overtaken by some cataclysm, which has left Tunhwang to stand alone—an island of verdure in an ocean of sand. After three hours' travelling, the coarse grit gave place to boulders, with flakes of mica glittering on the ground ; then, following what seemed to be the bed of a former river, bordered by cliffs of conglomerate, rising gradually to a great height, we were led to the back of the sandhills, where unexpectedly we entered upon a green oasis planted with fine young poplar trees, some still vividly green, while others had already changed to clearest yellow. Here were the rock-temples.

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

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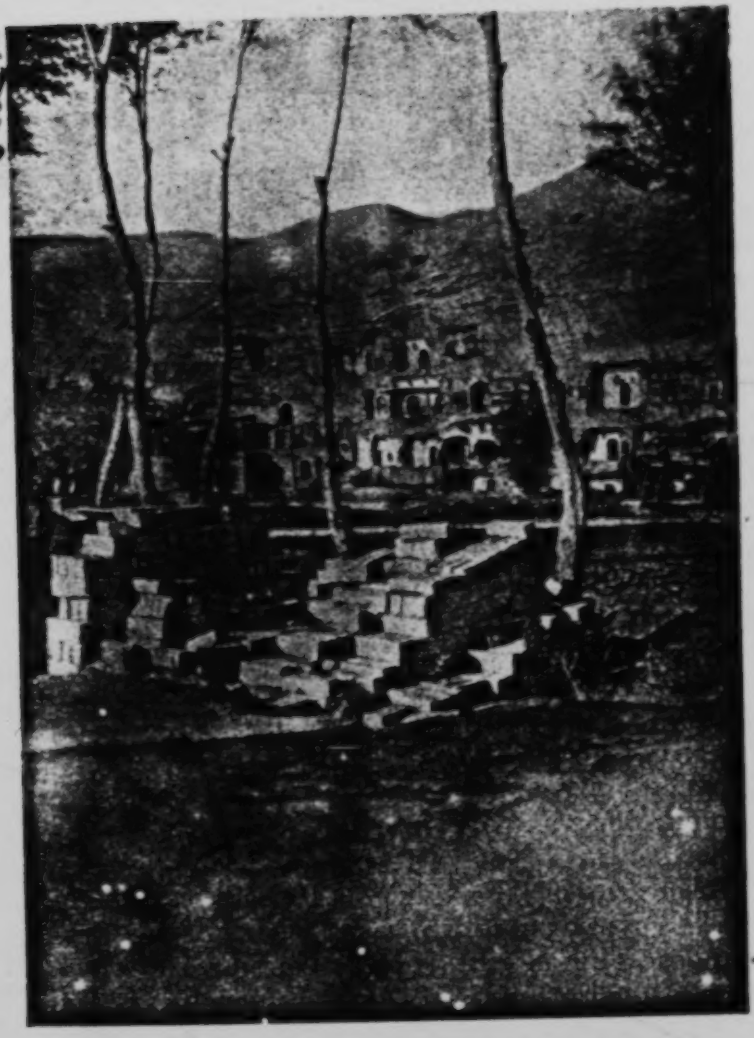

THE CAVES OF THE THOUSAND BUDDHAS.

"Many of the upper shrines have now no frontage at all, so that they can be seen from the valley below."

To face page 134.

[FACING p. 134]

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

The self-appointed guardian of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas is an interesting man, who by his own unaided efforts has enormously improved the place—a Taoist priest, from the Province of Hupeh, he came twenty-eight years ago on a begging pilgrimage to Chienfutung, which in those times was nothing but a barren waste with a trickling brook losing itself in the sand. Wang-tao-shi—for that is his name—soon utilised this water for irrigation; he planted all the trees with his own hands, and sowed enough crops for his maintenance and that of his acolytes. He also erected a large, commodious rest-house, containing a lofty, cool hall surrounded by sleeping-cells, all spotlessly clean; while he himself occupied one small room adjoining a tiny kitchen. In order to repair the caves he has made frequent begging expeditions, and has also from time to time received large sums in exchange for certain old manuscripts, now in the possession of various museums; but he has never enriched himself, all being spent on the upkeep of the temples. The caves have been hollowed out by hand from the almost perpendicular cliff, which they have honeycombed, and each contains some particular representation of Buddha, by whose name it is distinguished; such as, 'The Temple of the Precious Three'; 'The Hall of the Solitary Buddha'; 'The Shrine of Sakimuni.' The walls are all frescoed, and extraordinarily well-preserved owing to the dryness of the climate; and as the façade has broken away in places, many of the upper shrines have now no frontage at all, so that they can be seen from the valley below. The atmosphere is marvellously clear, and they present an exceedingly fine effect. This breaking-away has also had the advantage of letting in the brilliant daylight to the shrines, some of which would be wholly inaccessible if it were not that small doors of communi-

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

cation have been opened through a long vista of grottoes; one could, therefore, wander on almost interminably. The paintings cover a great period of time, some dating back to the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–A.D. 265), others to the Sung (A.D. 960–1280), and many of the best to the Tang period (A.D. 618–905).

A good number have been covered over by more recent stencil-work, the various layers of the colouring being clearly visible where the doors have been cut through. A very usual pattern for covering the walls is made by the use of innumerable small clay medallions, which viewed from a distance seem to present a geometrical design, but which on inspection are found to consist of a draped figure of Buddha sitting in an attitude of contemplation.

Most of the large idols were in raised alcoves, sometimes approached through an ante-chapel, in which were life-sized figures in flowing garments, their heads outlined against gilt haloes, or flame-bundles. The most delightful decorations represented family scenes in Paradisaic Gardens, where dainty ladies leant over lakes, or stood on camel-back bridges, watching the birds circling round the lotus tanks, while happy children ate ambrosial fruits.

Episodes from the life of Buddha recurred in many forms, as also illustrations of the delights awaiting those who attain to the joys of the Buddhist heaven. The ceilings were not arched, as one would expect in cave-dwellings, but were cut out to a square, the sides of which sloped upwards about five feet to form a smaller square. Anyone accustomed to the Chinese measure used for grain will understand that this is the shape of an inverted '*dou*.' We saw several colossal figures nearly a hundred feet high, one of which is enclosed in a roofless hall with head open to the elements, and another

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

is an unusual representation of the Buddha reclining in the final state of Nirvana. A detailed account, as well as splendid pictures of these wonderful caves, can be seen in Sir Aurel Stein's record [1] of his visit to Tunhwang in 1907, when in company with the old guardian, Wang-tao-shi, he opened up a temple containing a mass of manuscripts of priceless value. These were written not only in the Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit languages, but also in Uigur script, which is a derivative of Syriac writing, in Runic Turki, and in a peculiar form of Syriac script as employed in Manichaean writing. The variety and quantity of these manuscripts showed they must have formed part of some ancient monastic library. Specimens of hand-painted silk banners brought from Chienfutung by Sir Aurel Stein may be seen in the British Museum, and many extremely ancient and interesting records of Tunhwang find their place to-day in the King's Library of that building.

On entering one of the larger temples, we were startled by the appearance of a Figure so totally unlike those which surrounded it as immediately to rivet our attention. It was that of a man standing by a tree, the face of which wore an expression so benign, sorrowful, and strikingly human as to cause us to remark to one another that it might have been intended to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. We were therefore particularly interested, on returning to Tunhwang, when we were asked the question by the students if we had noticed that they had given our Jesus a place in their Pantheon.

At the extreme southern end the caves contained more modern work, and the terrifying grotesques of the Chinese temple came into evidence once more. Here we entered a shrine whose deity was surrounded by a banner proclaiming it to be 'The Pitiless One.' On

[1] *Ruins of Desert Cathay*, Sir Aurel Stein.

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

either side stood an attendant, one of which was a gaunt brown shape of terror sent forth to induce men to commit suicide by taking opium. His was a dread figure indeed, but not to be compared with the second, which represented the female instigator of suicide, by means of cutting the throat. She carried no emblem to make her mission clear, but every line of her insinuating face and bold, compelling eye, suggested the Power of Evil, able to break down the last hesitation in the mind which contemplated this dreadful deed; and Chinese women have since told us that many a bride has cut her throat after a visit to that shrine. The consummate horror of this representation so impressed us, that we can well believe it.

Chienfutung habitually stands solitary, but for the visit of an occasional pilgrim, except during one week of the year, when thousands of worshippers crowd its temples, and the air is heavy with burning incense. Streams of small-footed women risk their necks on the precipitous, crumbling paths leading to the upper galleries, nor will they, in spite of the utmost fatigue, leave one single temple unvisited, lest having done so much, they should fail to conciliate that last, final deity whose malice might be incurred by neglect!

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAKE OF THE CRESCENT MOON

We returned to Tunhwang so enthusiastic about the art treasures of 'The Hall of the Thousand Buddhas' that our visitors urged us to make a second expedition to another beauty spot of the locality, Yüehyachüan—'The Lake of the Crescent Moon.' 'Chienfutung is

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China AF13
~~Sinkiang AL1~~

we strolled between the flower-beds listening to singing birds, which, alas! were in cages concealed among the branches of the trees. The arrangement of the garden was highly skilful and artificial. In one place a miniature mountain showed tiny paths connecting shrines and temples, all built to scale, while the whole was watered by the ramifications of a sparkling little stream, on the banks of which stood diminutive men, women and children—the whole happy-family scene conveying the impression of a life spent in Elysian fields, which no disturbing element could touch. A good deal of the verdure in the flower-beds was supplied by asparagus plants, known to the Chinese as 'Dragon's Beard,' which seems to be indigenous to Kansu, but which, strange to say, the people do not care to eat. Many are the bitter weeds, leaves and buds which the Chinese cleverly convert into palatable food, but the delights of asparagus have not yet been discovered by them, and it is distressing to a Westerner to see the shoots allowed to go to leaf without ever being cut.

The meal served to us was of the usual kind, commencing with dessert and *hors d'œuvres*, and proceeding to chicken, fish, birds' nest soup, and sweet rice; then reverting to sharks' fins, seaweed, and apricot-kernel syrup; ending with plain boiled rice, rolls, and several basins of vegetable soups with meat balls, while on this occasion a seasonable dainty was provided in the shape of light fritters, made from the petals of the tree-peony. As we were by now on a footing of intimate friendship with these ladies, the social intercourse and delightful food thus prepared for us made a pleasant interlude coming between the exacting claims of the last days.

Late one evening a Suchow man of our acquaintance, Mr. Li by name, called, bringing with him a gentleman

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China AF13
~~Sinkiang A1-1~~

52/ whom he introduced as a friend travelling from Urumchi to Lanchow. Pending the moment when he should ●172 declare the object of his visit, we engaged on a conversation which, starting with enquiries regarding our respective ages, family circumstances, and the reason of our living in Suchow, led on to the cost of living, the local money exchange, and various other topics of interest. After some time thus spent, the stranger drew from his pocket an object wrapped in a cloth which he unfolded, and produced a petrified egg, asking if we were interested in such things. Mr. Li explained that he could not expect travellers of our experience to marvel at a mere egg, but the man said : ' Eggs of this kind are scarce, and some foreigners give big prices for them.'

' Where did you find it ? ' we asked.

' It was picked up in the Gobi Desert.'

' What are you going to do with it ? ' we enquired.

Mr. Li bent forward and explained *sotto voce* : ' The egg is greatly coveted by a powerful Official, and this merchant has had to leave Turkestan on that account. He is willing to part with it, but says its price is one hundred pounds.' Both men looked questioningly at us, but the offer elicited no response, so the owner of the egg shook it vigorously, whereupon a slight gurgle was heard, and his eyes glittered with delight.

' He says that is a jewel rattling inside,' explained Mr. Li.

Our advice was that he should take his treasure to Lanchow, and show it to a famous Swedish archaeologist who was living there.

' He can tell you all about it,' we said : then, with unpardonable stupidity, added, ' Whatever happens, do not let it get broken ! '

He thanked us, exchanged some more polite words, and Mr. Li then revealed the main object of the visit by

3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China AF13
~~Sinkiang AF 1~~

asking if he might leave the precious egg with us for the night, as his friend was afraid of losing it.

The next day he fetched it away and we saw him no more, but some time later news reached us that, unable to restrain his curiosity, he had broken it open but failed to find the jewel within!

11th June, 1926, was the day decided on for our departure. Our explicit orders had been that all three carts must be completely packed by the evening of the 10th, as we should leave at daybreak on the 11th. For days past everyone had worked ceaselessly, yet the sunset of the last day saw various small jobs inevitably held over until the next morning. The nine mules were only brought back newly-shod from the farrier's after dark. Had we been so inexperienced as to question why this important job should be left to the last afternoon, the answer would have been: 'Had anything occurred to delay your departure, the shoes at present in use would have lasted another three weeks, and what a lot of money we should have saved you!'

On the 11th we all rose at 4 a.m. in order to start before the great heat began. We drank a single cup of tea, after which the kettle, teapot and cups were packed into the food-basket and stowed away in the recesses of the cart. Men ran hither and thither; neighbours came in to say last farewells, while a crowd of our beloved children ran in and out to report generally on the progress made. It was, however, midday before our carts left the compound, yet had we suggested the possibility of dinner, there must have been a further delay, so we suppressed our desire for food, and made a start. Never had our carts been so heavily laden, and as each fresh bundle appeared, the crowd of bystanders sighed, announcing openly that no mules could possibly accomplish what was expected of ours! There was